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THE EPIC SCHOLARSHIP OF IRFAN SHAHÎD : AN EPIC HISTORY OF THE PRE-ISLAMIC ARABS AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH BYZANTIUM FROM CONSTANTINE THE GREAT TO HERACLIUS AND THE ISLAMIC CONQUESTS OF THE BYZANTINE DIOCESE OF ORIENS

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OF THE BYZANTINE DIOCESE OF ORIENS <sup>(1)</sup>

It is an honor, and indeed a great pleasure to attempt here an evaluation of the life's work of a friend and a great scholar, in the pages of *Byzantion*. It will be obvious to the reader that I cannot even begin to encompass effectively the massive and fecund scholarly work of Irfan Shahîd in these few pages. The most that I can hope for is to draw attention to its rich content, and to its great historical significance for all those who concern themselves with the world's major historical, cultural, and religious events and changes.

Before proceeding to the subject I should like to call attention to the devoted labors of father Demaret who has given himself, over the years, to the translation of a part of the works of Shahîd, from English to French. This he has done for a good reason inasmuch as all those who have difficulty with Shahîd's richness of the English language would have been discouraged from wading into the complexities of Shahîd's thought and writings. They must all be grateful to him for this difficult undertaking.

Abbreviations

- BA      *Byzantium and the Arabs. A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs*, Washington D.C., 1984  
BAFOC *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, Washington D.C., 1984, 2006

(1) The English text of this paper has been reviewed by the redaction of *Byzantion*.

- BAFIC *Byzantium and the Arabs on the Fifth Century*, Washington D.C., 1989, 2006
- BASIC *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*  
 Vol. I, Part 1 : *Political and Military History*, Washington D.C., 1995  
           Part 2 : *Ecclesiastical History*, Washington, D.C., 1995  
 Vol. II, Part 1 : *Toponymy, Monuments, Historical Geography and Frontier Studies*, Washington D.C., 2002  
           Part 2 : *Social, Economic, and Cultural History of the Ghassanids*, is presently in the hands of the press
- BISC *Byzantium and Islam in the Seventh Century*. The final volume in the series is still awaited.

Having dedicated a major portion of his scholarly life to the relations between Byzantium and the Arabs as well as to the histories and cultures of two world empires and civilizations (Byzantine and Islamic), Irfan Shahîd has created (in the scholarly sense of the word) a monumental history of the relations of the pre-Islamic Arabs with the Byzantine empire from Constantine the Great to the reign of the seventh century emperor Heraclius. His relentless labors and their codifications have been published in ten "precious" (to utilize a word that Shahîd has applied frequently in discussing many of the polyglot primary sources) volumes with an eleventh now in the hands of the press, and a twelfth presently and rapidly in the process of "becoming". The results have been welcomed by the scholarly world and especially by those who deal with Late Antiquity, early Byzantine and early Islamic history. Shahîd's findings will continue to stimulate these scholars to re-examine their own positions, studies, theses, and their more general interpretations in the above mentioned fields. A random perusal of the many entries in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* and of the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (both by Shahîd and by others as well) is but one of many testimonies to the value of his work.

One should begin with an examination of Shahîd's scholarship, a scholarship characterized by an openness to all scholarship bearing on the theme under discussion ; a willingness to build on that part of a centuries and a half of serious scholarship that he has found essential or useful ; a freedom to debate all that which he has not found acceptable ; a vigorous insistence on rejecting that which he has found unacceptable ; and, most importantly, a critical examination of all primary sources, whether written or material. Before proceeding to the matter of Shahîd's methodology it is necessary to introduce here, in a few words, the major role in Shahîd's research and writing of the

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection of Harvard University in Washington, D.C., and the presence there of two other outstanding scholars concerned with the relations of Byzantium and the Arabs) the late Professors Alexander Vasiliev and Marius Canard. It so happened that Vasiliev (the emigré Russian Byzantinist, who had succeeded Michael Rostovtsev), upon retiring from Wisconsin, moved to Dumbarton Oaks. There he continued his active program of researches until his death shortly before Shahîd was appointed Junior Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks for the year 1954-1955. Vasiliev had published his original studies on the relations of Byzantium with the Islamic Arabs (in Russian) in 1899-1900 in the Russian scholarly periodical *Zhurnal Ministerstvo Narodnogo Prosviescheniie*, and in *Vizantijskij Vremennik*. Thirty-five years later, and after Vasiliev had emigrated to the United States, Henri Grégoire, essentially with the labors of the French-Algerian Byzantino-Arabist Marius Canard, published an expanded French translation of the first volume of Vasiliev's work, in Brussels, a work that dealt with the period of the Byzantine Amorion dynasty (820-867).

In the fall of 1954 the director of Dumbarton Oaks had invited Canard to Dumbarton Oaks a full term in order to examine closely the papers and researches which Vasiliev had left unfinished, and to see if there was any follow up to the second part of Vasiliev's Russian studies on the relations between Byzantium and the Arabs in the ninth and tenth century. Though the research did not turn up anything new on that particular subject, the presence of Canard at Dumbarton Oaks was to be an important prelude to the further pursuit of the translation and substantial rewriting of Vasiliev's Russian text on these Byzantino-Arab relations. Indeed the intentions of Grégoire to see a new version of part two of Vasiliev's Russian work resulted in the re-invitation of Canard to Dumbarton Oaks to translate the Russian text of part two, and then to double its contents on the basis of his later research, which now included many more Arabic and Byzantine texts than had been accessible to Vasiliev. This completely new edition saw the light of publication, again in Brussels, in 1968.

The one year stay at Dumbarton Oaks in 1954-1955 was to have a durable effect on Shahîd. Aside from the stimulation of the Dumbarton Oaks interest on Byzantium and Islam and the presence of Canard, Shahîd turned now to his teaching career, with brief stays at UCLA and the University of Indiana, before returning to Washington, where he was invited to join the faculty of Georgetown University and where, in

1981, he was eventually appointed to the endowed chair as Oman Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Here he has distinguished himself as one of the leaders of his field. Having 'tasted' the rich scholarly resources of Dumbarton Oaks in the mid 1950's he realized that his research would have to be in and around Dumbarton Oaks, little more than a stone's throw from his office in Georgetown. A series of directors of studies at Dumbarton Oaks very generously gave him an office on the grounds of the Harvard Byzantine Institute and there Shahîd turned to what can be termed, only in the very best sense, his "mass production" on the relations between Byzantium and the Arabs. The combination of Georgetown University and Dumbarton Oaks henceforth became his scholarly stamp. Very much like Canard and Vasiliev before him, Dumbarton Oaks became an important center for the study of Byzantium and the Arabs, from the mid 1950's to the present.

In terms of the research focus of these three Byzantino-Arabists (Vasiliev, Canard, Shahîd), there is a major division of their central focus. That of Vasiliev and Canard centered on the relations of Byzantium with the Muslim Arabs in the ninth and the tenth-eleventh centuries. Shahîd, on the other hand, selected as his major subject the relations of Byzantium with the pre-Islamic Arabs in the Byzantine diocese of Oriens, from Roman times to the fateful battle of the Yarmuk (636). At that time the newly emergent Islamic Arabs destroyed the Byzantine armies and effected the rapid conquest of Oriens up to the borders of Anatolia. The conquest of the Sasanid Persian empire was complete as well. Thus Shahîd's choice of subject was to fill out that part of the history of the Arabs long before the appearance of Muhammad and was intended, in part, to explain the reasons for the rapid conquests by the Muslim armies in the seventh century, as well as to "recover" that lost history <sup>(2)</sup>.

By virtue of scholarly, and particularly linguistic preparations he came to his task remarkably well armed. At Oxford he had taken the B.A. in Classics and Graeco-Roman history, and at Princeton he obtained his PhD in Arabic and Islamic studies. Among his earlier published articles are critical evaluations of Byzantine historians as sources for the

(2) His use of this verb is highly indicative of the fact that scholarship, after a bright beginning with Nöldeke in the nineteenth century, had abandoned substantially the pre-Islamic history of the Byzantine Christian Arabs.

history of the relations between Byzantium and the pre-Islamic Arabs. This was an initial indication of the path that his research was to take. Well trained in Greek, Latin, Arabic and Syriac, he brought his philological skills to bear on a thorough and critical examination of all the primary sources to be found in the literary and epigraphical materials. Further, as we shall see, by his division of the sources into two general groups, Graeco-Latin and Oriental, he was able to use this division as a critical tool to check the reliability of "each of the two source groups, and where critical considerations allowed it, to use one group as a supplement to the other source group". The use of archaeological data, numismatics, toponymy and anthroponymy allowed him a further facility in the comparative philological analysis. It is noteworthy that Shahîd devoted the year 1993-1994 to a series of onsite surveys in Jordan (from his base at the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman), and in Syria (from the German Archaeological Institute in Damascus). He notes: "This work was concluded in the summer of 1994; by that time I had visited the entire Ghassanid limitrophe from the Euphrates to the Gulf of Elat. My vision of the sites and of the Ghassanid achievement in the limitrophe, noteworthy for its climate and terrain, was thereby revolutionized".

Though the much earlier topographical and archaeological surveys have provided scholars with important, indeed rich, details as to roads, towns, villages, deserts, watered areas, and historical, this survey of Shahîd is much more concrete as to the Ghassanids, who played a crucial role as *foederati* of the Byzantines in the sixth century <sup>(3)</sup>.

Closely related to and intertwined with the polyglot armature of Shahîd is the methodology which he has applied to the "recovery" of the lost history of the relations of Byzantium with its pre-Islamic Arabs. The methodology is designed like some massive trawling fish net which when dragged carefully through the complex of all literary and material sources is designed to "recover" all the data and references, particularly to the Arabs that Shahîd has set out to study. Given the relative paucity of such sources, each such item snared in his methodological net acquires an invaluable (or to use Shahîd's preferred word, always

(3) On topography especially the earlier works of V. CHAPOT, *La frontière de l'Euphrate de Pompée à la conquête arabe*, Paris, 1909, reprint Rome, 1967; and, R. DUSSAUD, *Topographie de la Syrie antique et médiévale*, Paris, 1927.

“precious”) quality. The next phase or step in Shahîd’s methodology required a different vocabulary to describe the precious data acquired by the method of massive sieving. The second element in his methodology is much more specific, and was inspired by the methodology of the nineteenth century Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke and may be termed the “tekmeriological” phase (the phase of logical proof). Shahîd’s methodology proceeds to the stage of proof of each datum snared in the massive net.

As Shahîd states : “Thus it was that Nöldeke transferred the structure of these particular Arab sources to Greek and Latin, and utilized the Syriac texts as supplementary, and preferable to the later Arabic sources, by virtue of the chronological priority of the former”. He also pointed to the utility of the materials to be found in pre-Islamic poetry. More recent scholarship, continues Shahîd (he includes himself in this generalization) has followed the methodology of Nöldeke.

Nevertheless Shahîd, at this point in his reasoning, asserts the following modifications in any unqualified surrender to the dictum of Nöldeke. The fact that a century has elapsed since Nöldeke wrote, “it is only natural that certain modifications should be introduced in this method.” First, the German Orientalist expressed his opinion in speaking of the sixth century Ghassanids, that the historical presuppositions in regard to the history of the Tanukhids, in the fourth century, and of the Salihids, in the fifth century, were quite different. On the basis of his very detailed *Quellenkritik* Shahîd concludes that the fourth century Arabic sources are much more important than the Syriac ones. Further, Arabic epigraphy, basically still undiscovered in the nineteenth century, was therefore unknown to nineteenth century scholarship. Their subsequent discovery made of them sources of primary importance for the history of the relations of Byzantium and the pre-Islamic Arabs of the fifth century. Finally, Arabic archaeology is now well developed and has made accessible extensive physical remains left by various pre-Islamic Arabs in the centuries from Diocletian to those of Heraclius, all of which were inaccessible to Nöldeke.

The third element in his methodology is put forth in the short introductory volume *Rome and the Arabs*. Positing the formation of the Byzantine state as having commenced with the reign of Constantine the Great, he notes, almost from the beginning of this volume, that the appearance of Constantine as ruler in Constantinople brought with it a radical change in official governmental policy toward the Arabs of the

Roman diocese of Oriens. Inasmuch as the labour of two centuries of specialists in Roman imperial history has attained a respectable and detailed understanding of the empire, Shahîd takes their findings and their interpretations of the sources, as largely valid, and so limits his concern with the original sources.

It is of some interest to note here that already in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. political and cultural frontiers between the Achaemenid world and the Greek city states had begun to shift westward as the Persians conquered the world of the Greek city states of western Asia Minor. Herodotus sees this conflict as the struggle between "Europe" and "Asia". The conquests of Alexander the Great and the rise of the large Hellenistic kingdoms for some three hundred years, witnessed a continuation of the shifting of the frontiers between these two poles, and the Arabs are visibly present as first the Parthian Iranians and then those of the Sasanids pushed the boundaries westward into the Fertile Crescent. Herodotus in giving a detailed description of the massive polyethnic make-up of the Achaemenid armies noted the presence of the mounted Arab archers who, mounted on their dromedaries, brought the struggle to Greece in the great expeditions of the early fifth century B.C. But as the Seleucid and Ptolemaic monarchies began to decline and to recede toward the Mediterranean Sea, a number of smaller states began to replace them, prominent among which were new Arab principalities in the Fertile Crescent, that is in the regions of Phoenicia and the Euphrates.

The first, and in many ways one of the most important points that Shahîd makes, is that when the Roman general Pompey extended the Roman boundaries far to the east consequent to his conquests and settlement of the east, 64-63 B.C, he found the Arabs omnipresent. In fact they had had relations in the Fertile Crescent and in parts of Egypt with the Seleucids and Ptolemies, and even before, with the local Aramaeans and Jews. Although these Arabs were subject to various Greek, Jewish and Aramaic influences they managed to retain their Arab identity especially in the frontier provinces, less so in the maritime regions. Thus the ethnic identity of the Arabs especially in the limitrophe regions was constantly renewed inasmuch as the were close to the borders with the Arab peninsula. Here Shahîd points to the fact that many of these Arab groups had already begun to form smaller dynasties and political entities, which reached their peak among the Arabs of Edessa, those of Nabataea and especially those of Palmyra.



According to Shahîd, Roman rule of the resident Arabs proceeded in two phases. In the first phase Pompey and his immediate successors left local affairs largely in the hands of subservient Arab dynasts who now became the clients of Rome. But already in the first century smaller Arab dynasts began to disappear, and, in the second century, the Roman state completed the disappearance of the local Arab client dynasties : in 106 A.D. that of the Nabataeans ; in 242 the Abgarids of Osrrhoenian Edessa ; in 272 the powerful Zenobia and the dynasty of Palmyra.

Taking as an indication of the role of the Arabs of Oriens in the Roman military structure Shahîd turns momentarily to the famous *Notitia Dignitatum* (ND), a source which gives the detailed dispersion of Roman military bodies throughout the empire. Here specifically in the Diocese of Oriens, in the late fourth – early fifth century, the Arabs appear as a major ethnic body in the military organization of Oriens : “The principal value of the ND to the student of Arab-Roman relations is that it reveals how Rome dealt with the Arab problem in the Orient-how after waring down, taming, and absorbing the Arabs within the Imperium, she enlisted them in her service to fight her wars against the Peninsular Arabs as well as other enemies. The ND thus documents the success of the Roman experiment in dealing with the Arab problem.”

He ends at this point, with two short notices of crucial importance for the author's subsequent volumes : the first has to do with a frequent anti-Arab animus in a number of Greek and Latin sources ; secondly there is Shahîd's important analysis of both ancient and modern authors who describe all Arabs as Scenitai or Saracens, that is as nomads and bandits. He sees among Arabs in general several different types : first, according to Shahîd, there are those Arabs who have acculturated or been absorbed in “urban” centers, whom he labels “Rhomaic” Arabs. Then there are the Arabs who fight in the armed forces of Oriens, whom he labels either citizens, or foederati ; there are the semi-nomads, and finally the nomadic Arabs. At this point Shahîd utilizes the vocabulary of cultural anthropology with considerable profit and refinement of his analysis in terms of cultural borrowing in the Byzantine environment.

The second volume, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (BAFOC) is the point of entry into the fully developed analysis. With convincing arguments he dips his massive net the extensive sources, and comes up with whatever has been preserved of the new relations of Byzantium and the Arabs (that is foederati Arabs in Byzantine Oriens,

of the fourth century. Shahîd marshals the evidence from the reigns of the Byzantine emperors, from Constantine the Great to the reign of Valens. Here the Graeco-Roman sources are crucial for both the political and military history of the relations of the Arab foederati and the Byzantine state. The basic questions which Shahîd attempts successfully to answer are the following: The nature of the new relationship of the Arab foederati with the state, which are subsumed in the appearance of the institution of the phylarchate. Crucial is the establishment of the tribe which undertook the phylarchate as the dominant Arab tribal group in the defence of the empire's defence of Oriens. Here the Greek-Roman sources are very poor as they very rarely mention the names of tribes and sub-tribal groups. Further, in the matter of the appearance of an Arab church, hierarchy, priests, and possible translation of the Gospels and the liturgical texts,

Shahîd, correctly attributes great importance to the Arab inscription at the burial site of the prominent Arab federate king Imru'al-Qays, buried at Namara in A.D. 328 (in the Roman province of Arabia). The inscription defines him as being the king of all Arabs; for he wears a crown, and under his sons he organized armies for the Byzantine emperor as cavalry units. Later sources inform us that he was the first Lakhmid to adopt Christianity. Thus his flight to Oriens is explicable. Nevertheless the appearance of new Arab cavalry forces under their king in Byzantine armies is a sign that the phylarchate was well on in the process by which Arab foederati replaced the dynastic Arab clients of the previous two centuries as major factors in the defence of Oriens against Persians, Lakhmids (those of Hira) and the Peninsular Arabs. Shahîd bolsters the proposition with inscriptional and textual evidence of instances of Arab foederati in the Oriens of the fourth century, showing that their organization was a novelty in the fourth century.

Thus the interpretation of the early and important Arab inscription of Namara, when coupled with other Graeco-Roman sources, confirm that Imru'al-Qays stands at the beginning of the functioning of this new phylarchate organization, and that the Arab Christian Chalcedonian queen Mavia stands towards the end of its development in the late fourth century. That, however which the contemporary sources failed to do was to identify the name of the tribe which exercised the dominant role among Byzantine Arabs in the phylarchate during this period.

In the fifth and sixth centuries the tribal group dominant over the various Arab federates was clearly first that of the Salihid dynasty in the

fifth, and that of the Ghassanids in the sixth century. Though Shahîd indicates that possibly Imru'al-Qays might have had a matriarchal connection with the Tanukhids there is no evidence for the connection with the queen Mavia. Having already referred to the later antiquarian Arab historian Hisham al-Kalbi who referred to Imru' al-Qays as the first Lakhmid king to convert to Christianity, Shahîd expands his analysis to indicate that this much later author, many of whose works are known principally through the works of those who utilized his lost works, had a particularly sound knowledge of the pre-Islamic history of the Arabs and of their tribes. In one of these works (of which the title alone survives) he had also written a work that dealt with the early history of the Tanukhids, the *Akhbar Tanukh wa Ansabuha*. Because of his reliability he was then utilized by later Islamic historians. These later historians, in relying on Hisham, state the chronological progress of ruling Arab tribes: the Jadima, Palmyra in the third century, Lakmids in Hira, Tanukhids in Syria, the Salihids, the Ghassanids. Shahîd points to the fact that the non-Arabic sources have confirmed the later Arab sources in every case, save that of the Tanukhids. The chronology being confirmed in five of the six cases, one can assume that the inclusion of the Tanukhids is also correct. He fortifies this conclusion with other arguments not the least important of which is the testimony of Tanukhid toponymy in Syria, and the sources of the sixth century which testify as to their settlements where they were still incorporated in the larger Byzantine body of Christian Arab foederati.

Thus it is that Shahîd laid the firm foundation for the basic institutional, political, military and cultural basis of the Byzantine Arab Tanukhids in the fourth century (BAFOC) replete with the historical evolution of the institutions of the phylarchate: the Arab Christian church, the military activities of these federates, and their trilingual culture (Byzantine, Syriac, and pagan Arabic). In so doing he does not omit the relevant developments in the world of the Peninsular Arabs and those of Hira.

Having established the origins of the new Arab foederatus institution of the phylarchate in BAFOC and having identified the dominant tribal foederati as the Tanukhids. Shahîd then analyzes and follows the successors to the Tanukhid as the dominant phylarchoi of the federate Christian Arabs in the diocese of Oriens, first the Salihids in the fifth, and then the Ghassanids in the sixth century (the volumes BAFIC, and BASIC). Though the methodology remains basically that to which refer-

ence has been made above, the treatment of the Ghassanids is fed by a considerably more extensive body of written and other sources with the result that BASIC in itself consists of three separate tomes. Accordingly the efforts and space set aside for *Quellenkritik* are much more detailed, as are the political and military events. Although Byzantino-Persian conflict was much restricted in the fifth century, in the sixth it became a large, widespread conflict between Byzantine and Persian territorial and military interests in the diocese of Oriens. Further the Arab clients of the Byzantines (the Ghassanids) and of the Persians (and their Lakhmid Arab allies in Hira) had their own private quarrels and military disagreements. The various sources at the time a great deal of attention to this, as did the later historical records.

Turning to the volume on Byzantium and the Arab foederati in the fifth century (BAFIC), Shahîd presents us with a remarkable analytic synthesis of the primary sources as well as of an integrative analysis of the pertinent nineteenth and twentieth century scholarship. The relatively slim nature of the outline and narrative of the preceding volume (commensurate with the relative paucity of original sources and data) gives way to a much more detailed account of the ongoing evolution of these relations. The scarcity of names of important Arab historical figures and tribal groups is replaced by a greater number in the Arab anthroponomy, and other toponymies, and of tribal identities. Particularly noticeable is the increased appearance of the names of Arabs, both urban and military, as well as of tribes. One learns the names of Arab phylarchs, bishops, monks, poets, as well as of Arab philosophers, saints and monastic abbots. In some cases there is reference to pre-Islamic poets in the courts of the phylarchs. These phylarchs generated a general effort to make of Arabic a written language for the appropriation of Christian books and literature, essential to their form of Christianity. Also there is the implication that it was necessary for both phylarchical courts and the bureaucratic offices to have Arabic secretaries in order to issue their tax and other documents on the foederati. The new agreement (foedus) for the conferral of a phylarchate by the Byzantine government meant that it had to spell out, in the official document, the obligations and benefits of the phylarch, and obviously, in Arabic.

Shahîd examines also, the participation of the phylarchs in Byzantium's Persian wars, although there was a long period of peace. More importantly he traces the phylarchate presence and its importance in the incessant conflicts of Arab groups on the southern borders,

who were constantly raiding and moving about. Finally in this volume Shahîd pays great attention to the effect of Christianity on the body of the foederati and particularly the effect of monasticism as the then dominant aspect of foederati Christianity. Keeping in mind that his final goal in this epic series of books is to arrive at conclusions and at explanations for the massive failure of the Byzantine frontier system to resist the Islamic conquests, Shahîd has finally established the fact that the Arab foederati had not only a political structure and institutions that were partially Byzantine, but that they had also contributed greatly to creation of an Arab Christian culture well before the rise of Islam. In doing so he also introduces in this volume Byzantine diplomacy in the southwest portion of the Arabian, peninsula and the history (short lived) of Christianity in these religions.

The main subject of the volume however is the era during which the Salihids constituted the dominant phylarchate in Byzantine Oriens, a role which they held for most the fifth century. The establishment of the Salihids as the dominant Arab foederati in Byzantine Oriens is a somewhat simpler task than Shahîd had encountered in the matter of the Tanukhid federate dominance in the fourth century. For he had at hand not only the later Arab sources (which relied on Hisham al-Kalbi) but he also had access to an important contemporary Greek source (Sozomenos's *Ecclesiastical History*) which noted the name of the leader that led the Salihids out of the Persian domains and into Byzantium. His name appears as Zokomos. Converted to Christianity after the blessing by a Byzantine monks, of his sterile wife, who then produced his first son, his conversion was followed by the conversion of his tribal group. Thus we have a clear case, as Shahîd has brilliantly demonstrated, of the reciprocal confirmation of the Greek-Roman historical tradition and that of the Oriental tradition. After the conversion and after his confirmation as phylarch of the Salihids the sources indicate that the Salihids took an active and important role in Byzantium's wars with the Persians and against the Arabs to the south.

The historical tradition of Hisham al-Kalbi gives us the names of his successors and pays particular attention to the head, king Dawud, of the Salihids in Byzantium, who continued to fight against other Arab groups, who built a monastic complex and who kept at his court the famous Arab poet 'Abd al-'Āṣ. Settled in the district of Provincia Arabia the Salihids, their phylarchs retained the dominant phylarchical role in Byzantine Oriens until their replacement by the Ghassanids in 502.

The relative 'fecundity' of the sources for the fifth century allow Shahîd to give important data on other Arab phylarchs who succeeded in receiving the writ of foedus from the emperors, and thus has ample opportunity to indicate that the numbers of phylarchates were numerous and never *solitary*. Shahîd defines in some detail the short history of two such new Arab phylarchates. The first is that of the Arab Aspebetos who settled with his followers, also in Provincia Arabia in the area called Parembolē (encampment). His conversion to Christianity is said to have occurred when St. Euphemius healed the Arab's son from a malady. According to the narrative this was followed by the mass conversion of his tribal following. At some point in time the ecclesiastical authorities proceeded to make of the tribal settlement a tribal episcopate and ordained Aspebetos (hereafter called Petros) bishop of Parembolē. The latter seems to have taken his Christianity seriously and seems to have participated in the debates over the nature of Christ. He participated in the oecumenical council of Ephesos in 431, and probably in the Latrocinium in 449. His successor as bishop of Parembolē, participated in the famous Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Malchus of Philadelphia (in the Decapolis of Provincia Arabia) though surviving only in fragments, affords Shahîd the opportunity to give the historical sketch of yet another Arab Christian phylarch, the phylarch Amorkesos. In many ways this is one of the most informative of the specific cases of the appearances of new Arab federate groups in Oriens. As in the case of many others Amorkesos was engaged in the Persian military order but for reasons that are not clear (his Christianity may have been one of these), Amorkesos decided to lead his tribal followers out of Persian service and soon appeared in northern Arabia. Eventually making their way to the Gulf of Eilat, in the course of his land attacks, he decided to demand a phylarchate from the Byzantine emperor, sending his bishop to negotiate the terms. Shahîd points to the historical fact that the emperor Leo was absorbed with sending a massive army to the west for the (unsuccessful) campaigns against the Vandals. Thus the appearance on the Oriens scene of the possibility of a useful military group fitted in with the needs for units to maintain order in the eastern provinces. The foedus was completed, and Amorkesos was received by the emperor in Constantinople, and henceforth he and his followers were sent to Palaestina Tertia as foederati.

Shahîd concludes that the followers were the advance movement of the Ghassanid Arabs into position in Oriens prior to the takeover of the

dominant phylarchate (from the Salihids) in 502. Coming back to the theme of the ever widespread presence of Arabs in Oriens, Shahîd had already predicted this in BAFOC (p. 386) : "...the Arab federate presence was complex and multitribal and ... there were many tribes : with federate status in Oriens other than the dominant group, the Tanukhids ... The Arabic sources on these tribes refer to them in areas in which they were settled in the seventh century... With rare exceptions, the chances are that these tribes were settled in the fourth century in roughly the same areas as in the seventh. Their dependence on their water and pasturage, rare in Arabia, makes their mobility very restricted."

Shahîd examines thoroughly the sixth and seventh centuries on the basis of a much expanded contemporary corpus of Greek-Latin and Syriac Arabic writings. Thus the history of Byzantine-Arab relations is developed in his BASIC v. I, parts 1-2 and in BASIC v. II part I. Part 2 of the latter is at present in the hands of the press, and the final volume is presently under the author's production, and will cover the final Islamic conquests of the Byzantine diocese of Oriens and the fate of Byzantium's Christian Arab *foederati*.

In BASIC vols. I-II Shahîd has attained a masterful narrative and thematic analysis of the Ghassanid phylarchate which so dominated the fifteen or so phylarchates and which at the same time and at various intervals ambulated between loyalty to and revolt from Byzantine authority. BASIC I,1-2 and BASIC II,1, are far more detailed than the previous volumes on the fifth and fourth centuries and deal with three basic developments in the relations of the Byzantine government and the Ghassanid phylarchate : the military, political and religious factors in the historical currents of the sixth century. In the domain of the borders and foreign relations the basic event, in contrast to the fifth century, was the intensification of political relations and intensified warfare with the Sasanids, Lakhmids and the peninsular Arabs, particularly the wars of the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids.

In this area the pendulum of victory favored the Byzantines especially during the reign of Justinian and the roles not only of the Byzantine *comitatensis* but especially the role of the Ghassanid phylarch Arethas played a very significant part in the clashes with the Sasanids and Lakhmids. At this point Shahîd addresses the matter of the growing theological and religious friction of Byzantine religious policy (Chalcedonian) and of a sturdy Ghassanid belief (Monophysitism) that was deeply rooted in both the phylarchs and their followers. This friction

goes back to the fact that at the time of the creation of the Ghassanid phylarchate in 502 the religious belief and theology, that of Monophysitism, was also that of the emperor Anastasios. Thus there was religious harmony between emperor and phylarch.

All of this changed in the reign of Justin I when the new emperor's creed was a strict Chalcedonianism that led to the outright persecution of the Monophysite church and episcopate in Oriens. One notes here the overriding importance that Shahîd places on religious differences in Byzantine Oriens, an importance which plays a crucial role in the relations of federate Arabs, on whom so much of the military defence of Oriens reposed. Shahîd thus interprets the absence of the Ghassanids from Byzantine military operations in Oriens during the years 519-528 as an absence on the part of their forces and the withdrawal of a substantial part of the Ghassanids to the Hijaz on grounds of sharp religious differences.

Shahîd interprets logically the long reign of Justinian as, among other policies, an effort to find a compromise which would accommodate the Monophysite Ghassanids who were an essential part of the empire's defence and expansions in the East, while he was concentrating on the reconquest of the West. His Arab policy attempted to enforce Chalcedonianism while making theological space for the Monophysites. This was essential in his overall policy of reconquest, for the sixth century saw an intensification of warfare on the part of the Sasanids and the Lakhmids. This long term theological policy of Justinian was accompanied by a substantial reform of political and military institutions in Oriens.

Shahîd's remarks on these two reforms depend largely on a careful interpretation of Justinian's official Historian Prokopios. Thus he traces the gradual decline of the military institution of the *limitanei* (guards of the borders) which Justinian carried out and their replacement with the institutions of the Ghassanid military forces. Hence also his decision to rebuild Palmyra along the Diocletian Strata. Thus the later war between Lakhmids and Ghassanids was fought over the Strata itself.

Towards 529 Justinian put under the command of Arethas many other Arab phylarchates and bestowed the Basileus on him as their king. In order to give some idea of the number of these phylarchates now put under Arethas, Shahîd finds that in the post-Justinian period on an occasion when the phylarchate of the Ghassanids was temporarily dissolved by the Byzantine state, some fifteen groups separated out,



most of whom deserted to the Sassanids, while others went to south Arabia and a few remained in Byzantium.

Earlier in the reign of Justinian Arethas was able, with the support of the empress Theodora, to reconstitute the structure of the Monophysite church by getting permission for the appointment of two new Monophysite bishops in Oriens, who now had the right to ordain clergy and to reconstitute the parallel patriarchates and also bishoprics. Justinian had already made theological proposals to mediate the hostility of the Monophysites : in 533 the Theopaschite effort, and in 553 the oecumenical council of that year, with its condemnation of the Three Chapters (Nestorianism), but the efforts had failed to win over the majority of the Monophysites. It is interesting that Justinian in his last years opted for an explicit Monophysite trinitarian theology, in adopting as state policy the support of the Aphthartodocetism of the extreme Monophysite Julian of Halicarnassos. This failed to survive the death of Justinian in 565. By this time the Monophysite church had split along theological and geographical lines and became in itself a political liability for the son and grandson of Aretbas (died 569). It led to the disenchantment of Arethas's successors, according to the presentation of Shahîd. For this religious matter became increasingly a burden for the Ghassanids phylarchs in their relations with the Byzantine state.

Shahîd sees, and he is persuasive, that the death of Justinian terminates the Byzantine state efforts to reach an accommodation with the Ghassanids and their Monophysitism. For the reigns of Justin II, Tiberius, Maurice and Phokas (565-610) present a vigorous, not to say violent, implementation of an intolerant Chalcedonianism which induced a repeated alienation, to the point of open revolt, on the parts of the Ghassanid phylarchs Mundir and Nu'man. This included a plot by the Emperor to have Mundir assassinated, upon the failure of which the phylarch was tried for treachery in Constantinople and then exiled for a long time in Sicily. This led to the revolution of Nu'man and the withdrawal of the Ghassanids for a period of some years (582-587) after which the Ghassanids reappear in the Byzantine armies.

The internal and external nadir of these problems was reached in the reign of Phokas. Then the towns of Oriens were consumed by risings and violence which were brutally suppressed by Phokas' generals Bonasas and Kottana at the time that Oriens was being threatened and attacked by the Sasanids. It is no wonder that eventually and during the earlier years of the reign of Herakleios Oriens was attacked and con-

quered by the Sasanids and their allies. Shahîd fits in the succession of Herakleios within a framework of political chaos in Oriens within which the disaffected leaders and cities of Oriens sided with him.

The epic scholarship of Irfan Shahîd has brought to historical life an entire society, and so discarded the inaccuracies of past scholarship as well as much of the ancient historical prejudices of those who massed all Arabs under the cloak of barbaric nomadism. He has done this by giving them their own history, a history which provides them with variegated social and political structures, with their own alphabet, a Christian literature and a Christianity with all its Arabic coloration. Its Monophysitism and its Arab heresies, its monasticism and its own versions of Ecclesiastical and monastic art and architecture, are their own creation. It had its own political and military heroes, its own dynastic chains and succession, both groups of which appear in Arabic poetry, and in Greek, Latin and Syriac chronicles and hagiographies. He thus gives these Christian Arabs an entrée into modern history as a fully formed cultural element with its own input into the multicultural milieu of Oriens alongside Greeks, Latins, Hebrew, and Syriac speakers.

Many of Shahîd's findings have kindled discussions and controversies among scholars who concern themselves with the Byzantines, the Sasanids, with the Islamic world that conquered the region in the seventh century, as well as modern scholars interested in the history of the Holy Land.

We anxiously await the publication of BASIC II, 2 on the region's culture and above all the final tome of this monumental labour on the Islamic conquest at the battle of the Yarmuk in 636 by the Muslim Arabs. This in the end brought the collapse of the political and social structures that had been so prominent in Oriens since the days of Constantine the Great. The Islamic conquest of Oriens once more moved the great boundaries between 'Europe' and 'Asia' westward from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. Shahîd's history of the Pre-Islamic Arabs in Byzantium is a 'possession for eternity'.

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## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article évalue les recherches que, tout au long de sa carrière, Irfan Shahîd a menées sur les relations arabo-byzantines et sur l'histoire et la culture de ces deux sociétés ; il est évident que cette contribution est surtout centrée sur les différents volumes de «Byzantium and the Arabs», somme monumentale de notre connaissance à ce propos.